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Lawrence A. Kreiser. *Defeating Lee: A History of the Second Corps, Army of the Potomac.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. 416 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-35616-1.

Reviewed by Zachery Fry (Ohio State University)

Published on H-War (April, 2013)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

Whenever the Army of the Potomac confronted a difficult task on the battlefield, its Second Corps could always be counted on to rise to the occasion. In the West Woods and along Bloody Lane at Antietam, before Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg, atop Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg, and against the Mule Shoe at Spotsylvania, the Second Corps showed its mettle time and time again. The corps' identification badge, a trefoil club leaf, inspired its battle cry, "Clubs are trumps!" It was this steadfastness–along with the esprit de corps lingering among its veterans after the war–that made it a worthy subject for the only corps-level history of the postwar period, staff officer Francis A. Walker's *A History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac* (1887). Scholarship in recent years has provided a steady stream of regimental histories (probably the best among them Randall Miller's 2007 *Harvard's Civil War*, about the Twentieth Massachusetts) and brigade histories as well, especially concerning the illustrious Irish Brigade. Now, arriving in time for the conflict's sesquicentennial, is one of the finest unit histories in recent Army of the Potomac literature–Lawrence Kreiser's *Defeating Lee: A History of the Second Corps, Army of the Potomac*.

Defeating Lee is a unit history that addresses the concerns of today's academic audience–political history, social history, veterans' studies, and even some brief but effective forays into combat psychology. Detailing the history of the Second Corps chronologically from the perspectives of senior commanders and enlisted men, the volume carries the reader through the corps' early days under Maj. Gen. Edwin Sumner to the war's conclusion and beyond. Divided into eight chapters and including multiple detailed appendices, the book chronicles the ebb and flow of the corps' participation in every major engagement as well as some, such as Bristoe Station, which have deserved greater attention for quite some time. Drawing from an impressive host of unpublished sources as well as nearly every regimental history the author could acquire, Kreiser's volume tackles nearly every issue with verve and insight.

Kreiser, a professor at Stillman College in Alabama, demonstrates a mastery of his subject. *Defeating Lee* is a unit history for both the academic and the layman, paying close attention to issues of soldier motivation and organizational history as well as battlefield trials and triumphs. His principal concerns are those of the professional military historian, and one of the book's great strengths lies in its analysis of the combat effectiveness of the Second Corps. Kreiser's descriptions of the outfit's organization, leadership, manpower, morale, cohesion, and discipline, all support his assertions that the corps contributed mightily to Union victory in the east. His knowledge of the army outside the Second Corps is equally masterful, reminiscent of Stephen Taaffe's recent gem, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac* (2006).

Defeating Lee is not a hagiographic volume, however, which helps separate it from some popular press unit histories on the market today.The author points to salient examples of Second Corps failure on the battlefield, none more gut-wrenching to the reader (and to corps commander Winfield Scott Hancock, for that matter) than the debacle at Ream's Station along the Petersburg lines on August 25, 1864. Kreiser's book deftly connects organizational issues with battlefield performance, showing for example how Hancock's 1864 reorganization contributed to a breakdown of unit cohesion and morale. Kreiser's honesty as a dispassionate historian does him credit when he declares of Ream's, "Many veterans were simply fought out" (p. 210).

Next to analyzing combat effectiveness, the volume's other principal asset is its grasp of the culture of the Sec-

ond Corps. The author shows that the outfit was heavily Democratic and heavily conservative on the great issue of the day, emancipation. Such analysis lends credence to Gary Gallagher's recent treatment of Northern motivation, *The Union War* (2011), and helps temper the sometimes forceful assertions present in Chandra Manning's otherwise well-received *What This Cruel War Was Over* (2008). Kreiser also levels a broadside at the curious claim in Gerald Linderman's landmark *Embattled Courage* (1987) that Union soldiers reenlisted in 1864 primarily to receive a furlough home where they could see family and friends one last time before dying on the battlefield. Although most soldiers of the Second Corps did not reenlist, those who did remained devoted to Union and their comrades, and they wanted to end the conflict themselves. Kreiser concludes his volume with a study of Second Corps veterans after the war, complete with the colorful story of how disgruntled Philadelphia Brigade veterans tried to crush the legacy of Union martyr Frank A. Haskell.

Numerous appendices show the transition of corps organization from 1862 to 1865. The book is as much a study of the organization and administration of the Second Corps as it is a battle history. Those wishing for any new detail or insights into the defense against Pickett's Charge, for instance, will turn away disappointed. This fact is hardly a shortcoming, however, because such an emphasis on combat and tactics is not Kresier's purpose here. Attractively organized and well written, *Defeating Lee* deserves its place as a staple in any library on the Army of the Potomac, large or small.

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Citation: Zachery Fry. Review of Kreiser, Lawrence A., *Defeating Lee: A History of the Second Corps, Army of the Potomac.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. April, 2013.

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